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**(S) NATIONAL RECONNAISSANCE OFFICE**  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

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Dear John:

These are the papers I propose to send to the EXCOM as a basis for discussion of the options for OXCART phase-out or retention which we discussed the other day in relation to Dick Helms' meeting with the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board.

Sincerely,

NRO  
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Alexander H. Flax

Mr. John A. Bross  
Deputy to the DCI for National  
Intelligence Programs Evaluation  
Central Intelligence Agency  
Washington, D.C.

NRO review(s) completed.

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PAGE \_\_\_\_\_ OF \_\_\_\_\_ PAGES

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CONSIDERATIONS AFFECTING OXCART PROGRAM PHASEOUT

The actions initiated by the BoB/DoD/CIA Study of November 1966 which resulted in the President's decision to phase out the OXCART Program in FY-1968, were based on a number of premises as to the operational, technical, political, and cost factors which affected the value of continuing this program even after a substantial military reconnaissance capability with similar vehicles (SR-71's) became available. Although, in accordance with the original decision the removal of the OXCART aircraft from flight status was to have been completed by December 1967, and phaseout was to have been completed by the end of FY-1968, several circumstances, including deployment of the aircraft to Southeast Asia, resulted in slipping the original plan. Some of the basic premises on which the phaseout decision was made have recently been questioned, and, since a considerable period of time has elapsed since earlier consideration of the issues involved, it is appropriate to review them once more. In any event, the OXCART Program is now at a critical point with respect to retaining all or some of the aircraft in operational status beyond June 30, 1968, or finalizing the decision to cease flight operations with the remaining OXCART aircraft by June 30, 1968 and to place the aircraft in storage thereafter.

In what follows, the various factors and issues affecting the OXCART phaseout decision are briefly outlined. The technical and operational implications of the differences in the OXCART and SR-71 air vehicles and sensor systems are omitted since these have been extensively treated in earlier NRO documents.

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PAGE 1 OF 1 PAGES

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THE REQUIREMENT FOR VARIOUS TYPES  
OF COVERT OVERFLIGHT CAPABILITY

The factors which should be considered include:

(1) Probability of requirement for high-performance covert overflight of highly defended areas (i.e., where U-2R or drone overflight is not practical) is the expected frequency of use of the capability and its value in relation to the cost of maintaining it, sufficient to justify the cost of maintaining it?

(2) Probability that civilian overflight will be the only covert overflight authorized.

(3) Possibility of providing covert civilian overflight capability as an adjunct of SAC operation (of either SR-71's or OXCART aircraft) under DoD management. Would this be equally acceptable from a political viewpoint?

(4) Overseas basing. Are there foreign areas where CIA operations with the OXCART aircraft would be acceptable but military covert operations would not be? Is the converse true in some areas? Is the relative acceptability of CIA vs. military operations dependent on whether there is already an overt U.S. military aircraft operation at the base used or in the same country?

RESPONSIVENESS

Would the continued OXCART operation under CIA management be more responsive to National intelligence requirements than SAC reconnaissance operations using SR-71's or the OXCART aircraft?

Conversely, is the OXCART operation less responsive to the needs of the Department of Defense, particularly where overflight coincides with or precedes military operations?

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PAGE 1 OF 1 PAGES

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Further, in uses such as North Vietnam where covert operation is not a consideration, is the necessity to apply covert security measures to an operation which would otherwise be non-covert, a handicap to effective military utilization of the capability and reconnaissance products?

#### COMMAND AND CONTROL

Does the CIA channel for command and control of covert overflight operations provide to National authorities greater and more direct control of operations in sensitive situations which may require sudden and unexpected changes in plans? Also, is the CIA reporting of operational incidents and unanticipated situations which may be of concern to National authorities more direct and timely than DoD's or, is DoD command and control to be preferred since it would provide for better integration with other DoD operated sensitive reconnaissance activities in the same areas and might lead to better overall assessments of local situations in light of all related activities?

#### INTEGRATION OF TECHNICAL AND OPERATIONAL SUPPORT

A useful covert overflight capability depends in large measure upon constantly developing and adapting equipment, tactics and operational procedures to insure an acceptably low level of vulnerability for the overflight aircraft. In the CIA all of the organizational elements required for analysis and reaction to new threat situations are essentially co-located and under the direct control of relatively few senior people without numerous intermediate levels of management and command. However, in many operational areas such as tanker support, logistics and airlift, overseas base operation and personnel, the OXCART program is dependent on DoD support.

In the DoD, while SAC as an operator of the reconnaissance activities is under direct control of the JCS, and SAC has within it certain organic technical and operational support capability, other supporting elements such as DIA, NSA, Air Force Security Service, Air Force Systems Command (the System Program Office and the Foreign Technology Division) are coupled to the operation by various direct and indirect ties,

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some of them involving several intermediate layers of command and management. In this respect, the support of SAC strategic reconnaissance activities is not greatly different than the support of other military operational activities. On the other hand, there is within the DoD a much broader base for support than in the CIA. Thus, for example, ECM equipment and vulnerability data may be drawn from other DoD programs and, without the restraint of covert security, in-theatre support for the SAC in such areas as communications, command and control and base operations, can be more economical and efficient. The question is whether currently provided support is adequate for maintaining a highly invulnerable reconnaissance capability in the face of changing threat environments. If necessary, it would be possible to simplify and make more direct the channels for technical and operational support of SAC reconnaissance by other DoD elements. However, SAC has not expressed either the need or desire for modifying present arrangements.

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